UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT

Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness

Mind, Body, Spirit: Linking Lives for Health and Wholeness

UCC Wellness Ministries Newsletter

January – February 2021, Vol. 6 Issue 1

REFLECTION:

“And now let us welcome the new year, full of things that have never been.” Rainer Maria Rilke

Welcome 2021! An emerging threshold awaits: a new year calling us to new directions. We step over the threshold with confidence and resolve. May we each focus on promoting health, peace, hope, and love.

HEALTH NOTES:

COVID Vaccination update.

Two vaccines are now being administered across the United States. The plan is for a phased administration with the first group including healthcare providers and residents and staff of nursing homes. The CDC is providing information on eight things to know about the COVID-19 vaccination program. The CDC is providing Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) Fact Sheets for Recipients and Caregivers. Thus far, the codes and URL links to access the EUA Fact Sheet documents have been developed for the following current and potential COVID-19 EUA vaccines:

- COVID-19 Pfizer BioNTech Vaccine EUA Fact Sheet for Recipients
- COVID-19 Moderna Vaccine EUA Fact Sheet for Recipients

It is vital for health education to reinforce the continued need for physical distancing, use of face masks, and frequent hand washing while the vaccination program is ongoing.

Washing Face Masks.

How often should you wash your reusable cloth face mask? Dr. Daniel Griffin, a member of the Division of Infectious Diseases and an Associate Research Scientist in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biophysics at Columbia University, told National Public Radio (*NPR)* that you should think of face masks like underwear, and that a face mask should be washed after each time you wear it.

“You don’t take this dirty mask off, put it in your purse and then stick it back on your face,” Griffin told *NPR*. “It’s something that once you put on, is potentially either touching your coughs, sneezes or the spray of your speech or protecting you from the coughs, spray, speech of other people. And now it’s dirty. It needs to basically be either discarded or washed.”

The CDC recommends cleaning masks in a washing machine and drying in the dryer. You can also disinfect your DIY face mask by handwashing it in a sink.

THIS MONTH'S FOCUS TOPIC: Loneliness

Loneliness is the feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact. Social isolation is a lack of social connections. Social isolation, which has been identified as a social determinant of health (SDOH), can lead to loneliness in some people, while others can feel lonely without being socially isolated.

A report done by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine found that before the pandemic, roughly 24 percent of adults 65 years and older who live on their own already were suffering from isolation and loneliness.

Older adults are at increased risk for loneliness and social isolation because they are more likely to face factors such as living alone, the loss of family or friends, chronic illness, and hearing loss. Recent studies found health risks associated with social isolation and loneliness:

- Social isolation significantly increased a person's risk of premature death from all causes, a risk that may rival those of smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.
- Social isolation was associated with about a 50% percent increased risk of dementia.
- Poor social relationships (characterized by social isolation or loneliness) was associated with a 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.
- Loneliness was associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.
- Loneliness among heart failure patients was associated with a nearly 4 times increased risk of death, 68% increased risk of hospitalization, and 57% increased risk of emergency department visits.

The COVID-19 pandemic is increasing the number of older adults who are socially isolated including both community-dwelling older adults and nursing home residents, as many states have issued stay-at-home orders and banned visits for nursing home residents. Prior to the disease outbreak, the vast major of community-dwelling older adults actively participated in social activities, such as attending senior centers, churches activities, traveling, and many other social events. Community services and programs provided adult-day care, respite care, homemakers, meals on wheels, and home health services. For frail older adults living alone, meal delivery staff may be the only person they meet on a daily basis. For nursing home residents, family visits are an important way for them to feel socially connected, and family members are their link to the outside world. However, due to the pandemic's lockdown policy, all these services and programs are no longer available.

In August, an AARP survey examined the impact of the pandemic on social isolation. The public messaging of remaining socially connected while keeping physically distanced is becoming more important than ever. A study, Combatting Social Isolation Among Older Adults in a Time of Physical Distancing: The COVID-19 Social Connectivity Paradox, was published in the journal, *Public Health*, in July 2020 to illustrate a new concept used to describe the conflicting risk/harm continuum resulting from recommended physical distancing. Studies have shown that social support, distanced connectivity, telephonic reassurance and engagement, support of community-based networks including those within faith communities, and health care systems use of telehealth approaches that include screening, diagnosis, and treatment of social isolation can mitigate social isolation and improve mental health status. The AARP Foundation offers several resources supporting seniors including a Chatbot that uses either Messenger or texting on a cellphone.

In March 2020, the UCC National leadership posted a statement about Church response to coronavirus (COVID-19) and noted “this is a time to consider the ways we can show love for our neighbors within the context of this current health crisis. Let’s pray for each other. Let’s look out for one another, demonstrate care for one another, and simply check in on one another. A phone call has great meaning and provides a lifeline for those who are alone.”

Faith communities are using creative approaches to maintain connections with socially isolated

members. Virtual teas, fellowship hours, and book clubs can provide weekly connections while maintaining physical distancing. Greeting card, email, and texting ministries connect children and youth with elders of the faith community. Visitation ministries deliver meals, share phone calls, and host outdoor distanced visits. Whenever physical distancing or video chatting provides an opportunity for you to show your face to others, share a big smile. Research has shown there is a positive effect from smiling.

THIS MONTH'S WELLNESS MINISTRIES MOMENT . . . Ideas for sharing love and essentials.

Looking back on the past year with the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, this issue highlights some ways communities have responded creatively to their needs.

1. A story from Pennsylvania about clothing sharing: '*Have one, Leave one, Need one, take one*'. Handmade signs are posted at each end of Main Street in Slatington, PA, surrounded by scarves, hats and gloves hanging from fences and clotheslines. Clothes providing warmth hang there for those in need to take. Project Warm and Cozy is a helping hand done at this time of year for a reason: to spread love and kindness, and holiday cheer. The project now has about 100 volunteers. It collects clothing donations in a storage facility in Slatington, which supplies the Caring Hearts Closet in Allentown, PA where those in need can "shop" for free.

2. Many respond to the need for face masks. During the spring and summer when people were looking to purchase or make face masks, many faith communities and individuals responded to

provide them. One woman hung a dozen homemade cloth masks on a tree in front of her sidewalk. A small sign read: “If you need one, take one. If you make masks and have extras, hang them here for someone who needs one”. For several weeks, the tree was laden with masks of all sizes, colors and styles. Like many local churches, your church may have had volunteers making and donating masks to those who needed them. One church received a grant to support local seamstresses who were unemployed by providing them with fabric and paying them for the labor of producing face masks.

3. Food Banks and Meal Sharing Programs. Feeding America describes the dramatic impact COVID-19 has had on food insecurity. From the beginning of March through the end of October, food banks nationwide have responded and distributed an estimated 4.2 billion meals to those facing hunger in the United States. This website also includes a link on how to help food banks. Many faith communities have been a central contributor to local food ministries including food pantries, food kitchens, meal deliveries, and school meal supplement programs. One example of a community initiative in North Carolina, PORCH, is an all-volunteer, grassroots hunger relief organization that collects food and cash donations through monthly neighborhood food drives, and then distributes food to hundreds of at-risk families in their communities.

These are but three examples of the countless ways that faith communities, civic organizations, school districts, health care systems, and local and state governments have responded during this time of a national health crisis. We extend a very heartfelt **THANK YOU** to all who have responded to the needs of others, adapted worship services, modified community connections, and provided sustenance, hope, love, care, and comfort.

HEALTH OBSERVANCES:

January: Glaucoma Awareness Month:

Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness. Glaucoma has been called "the sneak thief of sight" since there are no symptoms and once vision is lost, it's permanent. People may be delaying eye examinations because of the pandemic. Informing people of the risk factors for glaucoma can help encourage those who should undergo examination to talk with their healthcare provider about scheduling an eye examination. Review other Information about types of glaucoma, diagnosis, and treatment.

February: February is American Heart Month:

There are multiple approaches wellness ministries can include in educational programs and individual health coaching. The Healthy Living section of the American Heart Association website includes topics related to Healthy Eating, Healthy Lifestyle, and Fitness. https://www.heart.org/.

While American Heart Month is a good time to offer blood pressure screening, faith community nurses who are practicing physical distancing are not able to hold blood pressure screenings. The Health Quality Innovators (HQI), the Medicare Quality Innovation Net-work-Quality Improvement Organization for Maryland and Virginia, under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) developed a poster, *7 Simple Tips to Get An Accurate Blood Pressure Reading at Home*. This poster can be downloaded, printed and shared with those you are teaching to do self-assessment of their blood pressure.

In October 2020, the Surgeon General issued a Call to Action to Control Hypertension. The CDC has posted information related to this Call to Action and general information related to hypertension, treatment and goals and also a Partners toolkit to connect with other professionals and spread the information through social media.

UCC NEWS:

Renovations to UCC.org website: In response to survey reports that the site had become cluttered and hard to search, this renovation initiative went "live" at the end of December and includes reorganized content and menus and optimized search options. Another feature has the ability to track, measure and report how ucc.org and its pages are being used. We are asked to exercise patience during the switchover, training, and addition of content. https://www.ucc.org/updated-ucc-website-offers-much-more-than-just-a-new-look/.

UCC Wellness Ministries information on new UCC website: Content transfer is not completed for these pages. Check here for ongoing updates. https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do-2/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/health-and-wholeness-advocacy-ministries/ucc-wellness-ministries-network/.

KEEP CONNECTED:

Visit our FaceBook and Linked-In pages: Post comments or share information about your health ministries; join in conversations.

https://www.facebook.com/pg/UCCFCN/posts/

https://www.linkedin.com/groups/6951713/

Editor's Note:

Future issues: Have a wellness ministry example you want to share with colleagues? Are you looking for an educational health resource? Do you have ideas to share for the next newsletter?

Send a note to request a focused topic in a future issue.

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